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SUBJECT: GVN OPENS PARKS AND LIBRARY ON DISPUTED CATHOLIC LAND AND
AUTHORITIES RELEASE CATHOLIC DETAINEES

REF: A) HANOI 1122; B) HANOI 1120; C) HANOI 1093; D) HANOI 1086

¶1. (SBU) Hanoi city authorities held ribbon cutting ceremonies opening two new parks on land disputed by the Catholic Church on October 3 and 8. The parks were built very quickly using hundreds of public employees at both the Papal Nuncio's residence on Nha Chung Street and at the site adjacent to the Thai Ha parish. The French colonial building that was once home to the Papal Nuncio has been transformed into a public library. Public prayer demonstrations at the two sites have ceased for now and the roads accessing both areas have been repaved and are again open to the public. A notable police presence remains at both parks, both plain clothes and uniform.

¶2. (SBU) Poloff visited both new parks on October 10 and observed a dozen security forces at each location. The sprawling Thai Ha park was christened "June 1st Park" after International Children's Day. During construction a number of buildings on the site that were owned by a state-owned enterprise were torn down. The back exit to the Thai Ha parish, previously used by parishioners to gain access to a road adjacent to the disputed property, has been sealed by authorities and police are stationed nearby. The park on Nha Chung Street has been named "Hang Trong Park" after the city district where it is located. Sources tell us each precinct in the city district has been asked to provide police to patrol the Hang Trong Park to ensure that Catholic prayer vigils do not resume.

¶3. (SBU) State-controlled media have recently highlighted the release of two Thai Ha parishioners previously arrested for destroying a small retaining wall around the disputed property. Poloff spoke with priests at the Thai Ha parish who confirmed that only two parishioners remain in detention, charged with destruction of public property and disturbing public order.

¶4. (SBU) After weeks of large-scale prayer vigils, the once tense standoff seems to have quieted due to quick GVN action to turn the properties into public parks after months of inaction. Catholics were particularly incensed by plans to use the properties for commercial ventures so turning them into public parks and a library may have taken some of the wind out of their sails.

PALMER